

# Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

## IN THIS ISSUE . . .

1/IWOC February Meeting

2/President's Message

3/IWOC Conference

4/Financial Planning

5/FYI: Renewals

Calendar

## IWOC FEBRUARY MEETING

# Computer skills for freelance writers

BY JAMES J. HODL

The days when freelance writers banged out articles on manual typewriters are long gone. The main tool of the trade is now the computer, which offers many time-saving features. Yet new PC technology also saddles us with new worries, which, although they may not be in the same league as the malevolent gnomes cartoonist Jeff McNally once theorized ran his computer, can still interrupt our work flow.

"Keeping your computer running properly so it won't 'byte' back doesn't require a lot of technical savvy—just some basic skills and a little vigilance," says Jim Thing, owner of JGT Consulting Co., a Streamwood-based computer-consulting firm. Thing will offer his help at the next IWOC meeting on Tuesday, February 8.

In his seminar, "Computer Skills for Freelance Writers," Thing will explain how to:

- ✍ set up and network a computer properly
- ✍ solve common computer problems
- ✍ minimize the scourge of spam
- ✍ set up a firewall to avoid computer viruses, worms, and Trojan horses

## BEWARE SPYWARE

Thing will pay special attention to the twin threats of adware and spyware, problems embedded into your computer by outside entities to record and relay reports on how you use your computer and where you've been on the Internet. The nastiest forms of spyware can take control of your computer, limiting where you can surf on the Web. Poorly written versions of spyware can cause computers to crash and even cease operation. Thing will explain how to avoid downloading adware and spyware and how to remove them.

Do you need information on specific functions of your PC? Are you experiencing problems with your computer? Bring your questions for the end of the program.

Thing has plenty of experience in creating computer systems for businesses, going back to 1975. He designed and built computer systems for Miller Fluid Power Co. from 1991 to 2002 and currently performs the same services for Parker-Hannifin Corp.

"Computer Skills For Freelance Writers" will be the centerpiece of the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, February 8 at the Feltre School, 22 W. Erie St. Networking (the personal, not the computer kind) begins at 5 p.m. and the program starts at 6 p.m. Admission is free for professional members and is \$5 for associate members and \$15 for nonmembers.

After the meeting, attendees are invited to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner and more discussion. ✍

## Computer Skills for Freelance Writers

Tuesday  
February 8  
The Feltre School  
22 West Erie  
Networking 5:00 PM  
Program 6:00 PM

FREE for  
Professional members  
Associate members \$5  
Nonmembers \$15

IWOC meets for  
programs and networking  
the second Tuesday of  
every month.

# iWOC

Independent Writers of Chicago

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# Where do you belong?

BY HARRY J. KARABEL

While it's true that I have lived in Indiana for the last 20 years, I grew up in Chicago, on the south side, near 51st and Kedzie. I grew up in the same neighborhood, on the same street, where my parents were born and raised. I also attended the same elementary school they did and had some of the same teachers.

That's right. Almost 30 years after my parents let the doors of Sawyer Elementary slam behind them, they opened for me, and three of my parents' teachers were waiting. They were a different breed, these three. From behind the same desk, gazing out at the same, gray playground, they had seen a generation come and go. They never forgot a thing, never believed any excuse, were highly suspicious, and were ready at any moment to strike fear into the heart of anyone who was even daydreaming about breaking the rules.

My mom was some kind of Brainiac who skipped grades with ease and graduated from high school when she was 16. My dad finished eighth grade and went to work. But he was the one those teachers remembered, and not for his good behavior. From the moment my name appeared on their roster, they expected trouble. Even though I quickly established a reputation that allayed their worst suspicions, this Triple Threat of Terror had learned to take nothing for granted. They knew that fear kept little people on their toes, and they would use fear wherever and whenever they could.

Once in a while I was called on to deliver a message or an important folder to some other classroom or the main office. It was great roaming the halls, completely unfettered. Everybody else was listening, working, straining their brains, and I was free—unless I happened to wander too near the open door of one of the Terrible Trio. Then I would hear a talon-sharp voice carve one of humankind's

most fundamental conundrums upon my shivering spine:

"Where do you belong?"

If they shot you with this arrow of truth, you had to be prepared to answer, and the answer better be good, because wandering aimlessly through the dark, drafty halls of life was not healthy, not right, and simply not allowed. Answer correctly and you were sent on your way with a glare that would melt

rocks. Answer incorrectly and, the promise was, you would be subjected to a series of mysterious but punitive horrors that would exceed the limits of your imagination.

It was not, educational and psychological scholars have since

concluded, the best way to learn. But it wasn't such a bad lesson after all. We all want and need to belong somewhere.

So, where do you belong? Do you belong in the company of other writers who spend every single working day trying to solve the same problems as you? Do you belong in an organization that is working hard to enable clients to find you and discover what you can do for them? Do you belong on a Web site where your individual talents and skills are searchable, where samples are easily downloaded, and where jobs that pay money are available?

It's time to decide where you belong. There are no razor-sharp sentinels keeping their steely eyes on you, ready to crush your wandering spirit and steer you away from complacency, sloth, or worse. There are only your friends and colleagues at IWOC, telling you that for a freelance writer in Chicago, this is the place to be. Make sure you take advantage of all benefits of membership, including the directory, by renewing your membership by the February 15 deadline. If there were people like the Terrible Trio in your life, they wouldn't want it any other way. ✍



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## Discover the Ideas and Information You Need to Take Your Writing Business to the Next Level at *The Freelance Life*, IWOC's New Full-Day Conference

By Jenny Hamby

Have you recently launched a freelance writing career? Or are you an established writing veteran who wants to take your business to the next level ... where you can work fewer hours for more money?

Then clear your schedule for Saturday, April 2 ... and plan to attend *The Freelance Life*, a full-day conference that delivers the guidance, tips, and insights you need to build a profitable career as an independent professional writer. The conference offers three different tracks to suit the interests of new and experienced writers.

The conference will feature the Freelance Writer's Boot Camp, a half-day, intensive seminar for writers with less than two years of independent experience, as well as people who are considering a freelance writing career. Attendees will learn how to establish a solid foundation for their writing business and discover what it takes to succeed as an independent professional writer.

Planned sessions for new and established writers include:

- Time-tested networking and cold calling techniques you can use to quickly develop leads, land clients, and generate new work
- Determining the true value of your services, establishing yourself as an expert, and getting and keeping more money from every project
- Low-cost, high-impact Guerrilla Marketing strategies you can use to generate more business without spending a fortune on promotion
- Nurturing your creativity, so you're able to consistently deliver fresh, creative copy and ideas ... and avoid burnout
- Best practices for professional writers ... including the contract and copyright issues that every freelance writer should know

Panel discussions held throughout the day include:

- "Freelance Survival," where veteran professional writers will offer tips on surviving and thriving as a full-time independent writer
- "The Writing Skills Roundtable," where various professional writers will field questions about their areas of expertise
- "The Customer Perspective," a frank discussion among Chicago-area editors and marketing professionals about what customers want ... and how freelance writers should position themselves to win jobs.

*The Freelance Life* will be held Saturday, April 2, 2005, at the Chicago Athletic Association, 12 S. Michigan Ave. Watch your e-mail and *Stet* for further details and registration information.



Show me  
(how to  
make)  
the money!

Be there  
April 2

## Financial advisor Mayfield gets to the bottom line

BY HARRY J. KARABEL

About a dozen stalwart IWOCers braved a frigid night and the weatherman's warning of an impending storm for an up-close-and-personal presentation from Morgan Stanley financial advisor Vicki Mayfield. Given the turnout, Mayfield quickly agreed to forego making a formal presentation in favor of hosting a more informal question and answer session.

She fielded a number of questions about Medical Savings Accounts. A number of members had tried the accounts but found them to be expensive. Mayfield agreed and said that making this type of account financially viable was "very complicated." She recommended the IRS Publication 969 for anyone interested in a Medical Savings Account.

Mayfield stressed the importance of saving as many pre-tax dollars as possible. "Give yourself the power of compound interest," she said. "The more tax-free or tax-deferred money you save, for a longer amount of time, the better." As long as you are a sole proprietor, even if you have an individual IRA and a SEP, you can set up yet another IRA as an employee. Be sure to talk to your tax or financial advisor before making any decisions.

There was much discussion of the value of a Roth IRA. You are taxed upfront on the money that goes into the account, but never on the disbursement. If the earnings are significant, so are the tax-free savings.

"Inflation is running at four percent," Mayfield said. "Consider what you have and what it's earning in order to stay ahead of inflation." If you are planning on using or tapping into your savings in two to five years, you probably want to make more conservative investments. Longer term, you can take more risk. Historically, the stock market has been a good long-term investment.

"Above all," Mayfield said, "Make sure your financial planner understands your financial goals." If you don't have a financial planner, Mayfield would be happy to put her more than 20 years experience to work for you. Give her a call at 1-800-488-4200 or 312-827-6618. ✍

**"Give yourself the power of compound interest," says Mayfield. "The more tax-free or tax-deferred money you save, for a longer amount of time, the better."**

## The Patriot Act and the writer

BY ELAINE FIEDLER

The current *Authors Guild Bulletin* includes a real eye-opener about the USA Patriot Act's impact on writers. Kay Murray, the assistant director and general counsel of the Authors Guild, writes that, because of the Patriot Act, federal agencies can more easily use wiretaps and phone taps; don't need to show probable cause for search warrants and subpoenas; can do searches without first notifying those being searched; can check e-mail and online activity; and can more easily subpoena third-party records. Section 215 allows access to the public's communication, research, and reading activities. The targets of surveillance cannot challenge it in court—unless they are charged with a crime, which they don't have to be to become a target of surveillance.

Well, you're not a terrorist or criminal or spy, you say? The kicker is that "the agency doing the surveillance just has to believe the information sought *might* be related to a national security investigation," according to Murray.

### A ROMANCE WRITER GETS A SURPRISE PRE-DAWN VISIT

What brings all this home is a bizarre story Murray includes. It seems that a member of the Romance Writers of America found herself a target of surveillance one early morning last year. Six federal agents raided her home and—pay attention—confiscated her computers, photocopier, files, books, discs and programs, music CDs, contracts, TV, pens, paper, and postage stamps.

No charges were filed against her. Her computer and some damaged discs were returned months later, but nothing else. The search warrant mentioned things related to her writing and research. Books, for example.

How could this have happened? It seems that the anonymous writer had been working on an adventure novel (begun before 9/11), and in her library research on Cambodia, where the story was set, she came upon stories about an al-Qaeda-linked group there. She now believes that she had "stumbled onto a Web site the government created for the sole purpose of entrapment." She also says her e-mail was tracked by a government program called Carnivore.

The romance writer advises people not to buy books online or check out books from the library that might be "flagged." She also recommends using a public or university library computer for Internet research. (The writer's story first appeared in the *Romance Writers Report*, November 2004.)

Murray notes that much of the Patriot Act will expire at the end of 2005 but that the president wants the provisions renewed permanently. At the same time, more than 150 Democratic, Republican, and Independent legislators are sponsoring legislation to amend the notorious Section 215 with the Freedom to Read Protection Act, which would exempt bookstores and libraries from subpoenas, as well as other bills to modify the Patriot Act. ✍

# FYI

## MAIL YOUR IWOC RENEWAL BY FEBRUARY 15

Your notice of membership renewal has been delivered to your e-mail. As most of you know, we had hoped we could do renewals online via PayPal, but we have not yet eliminated all the bugs. We hope to have the PayPal option available next time. Note: Because the original renewal date was supposed to be in September, you do not have to renew if you joined in August or later. You are paid up until next year.

For everyone else, here's what you need to do:

1. Login to your Members-Only page. Click where it says "click here" to bring up the renewal forms. (They are in PDF format.) Print them.
2. Fill out the forms as you have in the past, tally up what you owe—don't forget the \$35 for the online directory if you want to be in that—and then make a copy for your own records. (Remember that you get five free listings.)
3. Send a copy of the filled-out form to the office along with your check.
4. Go to the Members Only pages on the Web site, click on "change profile," and then, using your paper form as a guideline, change your profile to conform with the data on the paper form. If you create and pay for a new category, you'll have to contact me—Joel Kinnan at 708-366-8573—to put the new category into the database so it will appear in your profile.)

Here's what will happen next:

1. The office will recheck your math to be sure payment is correct. If it is not, you'll either get a refund or someone from the office will call you to tell you what you owe additionally.
2. Once you've paid, the office will send the form to me. I'll review your online profile to be sure it matches the paper form, and then I'll change the online subscription info (visible only to the administrator) to mark you as paid up for this year.

To ensure your listing will in the print directory, your renewal must be postmarked by February 15. The IWOC office address is:

IWOC  
PMB 119  
5465 West Grand Avenue, Suite 100  
Gurnee, IL 60031

If you have any problems or questions, contact me at webmaster@iwoc.org or jpkinnan@comcast.net.

*Joel Kinnan*

## Calendar

February 8 (2nd Tuesday)

**IWOC monthly meeting: "Computer Skills for Freelance Writers."** Jim Thing, computer programming professional and owner of JGT Consulting, answers your questions about PC computer functions, offers how-to help, and presents solutions for nagging problems. At The Feltre School, 22 West Erie, Chicago. Networking at 5 PM; program at 6 PM. Professional members free, associates \$5, nonmembers \$15.

February 15

**Your IWOC renewal must be postmarked by February 15. See column at left for information.**

March 8 (2nd Tuesday)

**IWOC monthly meeting: To be announced.**

April 2

**IWOC's new full-day seminar: "The Freelance Life," designed for freelance writers at any stage in their careers.** Mark the date on your calendar! Watch for *Stet* and your e-mail for more details and registration information.

***The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted. The groups welcome nonmembers.***

February 3 / March 3 (1st Thursday)

**IWORP monthly breakfast:** Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more information, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

February 27 (4th Thursday)

**IWOOP monthly lunch:** The West Suburban group meets at noon at Poor Phil's at 139 So. Marion, Oak Park. Contact Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065.

**Check out  
IWOC's Web site at  
[www.iwoc.org](http://www.iwoc.org)**